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The development of individualized educational programs in Turkey

IEP applications

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Abstract

The overload of general instructional programs makes it difficult to meet the educational needs of students with special needs. Specifically tailored instructional programs and educational settings organized appropriately are the only medium to supply the needs of individuals with special needs. The major difference between special and general education is that the disabled children require a series of individualized instructional programs, supportive special education services, and relevant assessment tools to learn certain skills that typically developing children acquire on their own. It is tremendously hard for the children with special needs to benefit from and adapt to general educational programs designed for their normally developing peers. Results of several studies indicate that individuals with special needs gain little from the general educational programs. Therefore, individualized education program stands as the instructional map for each child with special needs, and forms the basis of planning the academic life of those children. This study will shed light on the necessity, importance, legal grounds, and development of individualized education programs in Turkey, and will also examine some cases to determine the benefits of individualized education programs for teachers, the disabled child, and the family.

Keywords: : Development of Individualized Education Programs; Turkey IEP Applications, The benefits of IEP.

1. Introduction

For centuries, it is known that the educational process should be designed in accordance with students' learning styles, developmental stages, and knowledge and needs (Gür, 2006). A child with special needs is the one who experiences difficulty in learning the skills and behaviors within the curriculum, or who needs arrangements and special education for learning and class management due to his/her idiosyncratic features (such as mental, physical, emotional, or social) or the interaction between him/her and the surrounding. Similarly, special education includes all services provided to children with special needs either in a regular or a special setting. Special education schools, pre-school institutions, primary schools, and vocational training centers are primary educational settings for the children with special needs. Individualized educational program (IEP) is a flexible action plan approved by the child's family and prepared by an inter-disciplinary team to determine where, when, for how long, and by whom the special education services that will balance the education of the child with special needs with the governmental standards should be provided; and it is also used to set annual educational goals for the child (Erbaş,

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2006; Kargın, 2007; Özyürek, 2005). Individualized educational program is a tool allowing the assessment of educational needs, adaptation of teaching, and the support services that students need. This paper will not only clarify a) the need for special education and its importance and legal grounds, b) the benefits that IEP offers to the teacher, the disabled child, and the family, but also will discuss c) the application of IEP in Turkey based on the relevant literature.

2.The need for IEP, and its importance and legal grounds in Turkey

The extent of success that children with special needs achieve in regular classrooms is highly influenced by the educational programs (Gibb& Dyches, 2000). The intensity of weekly schedules within general education programs put obstacles in front of meeting the educational needs of children requiring special education. IEP helps diminishing these limitations and increase students' chances to become successful within the system (Sarı, 2002). Arranging all the components of education in accordance with the individual differences and needs improves the efficacy and effectiveness of education. Therefore, individualized educational programs should be prepared for the education of children with special needs who differ from their normal developing peers mentally, physically, emotionally, and/or socially to the extent that would entail special arrangements on educational processes and settings (Kargın and Akçamete, 1991). Individual differences make it mandatory to make adaptations on the regular school/course program through use IEP for the children with special needs.

In the past, children who were not considered in the high risk group to be negatively affected by the regular education routines and settings were usually not included into the process of preparing an Individualized Educational Program (IEP), and it was very common for them to experience academic or adaptation problems.

Developing and using IEPs is a relatively new concept in Turkey, and day by day more and more children benefit from this opportunity. In Turkey, special education services were affiliated with General Directorate of Special Education and Counseling Services on behalf of the Ministry of National Education in 1980; subsequently, Counseling and Research Centers were established in every city in order to unite all the related services. In 1983, the Law# 2916 Empowerment of Children with Special Needs was put into practice, and education through "inclusion" was first open to discussion with that law. Later, in 1991, the Special Education Council decided to expand inclusion across schools, and to individually plan the education of the children accepted for the inclusion. With the enactment of Decree # 573 in 1997, the idea "to prepare IEP for individuals with special needs and to administer educational programs individually" was accepted; and preparing an IEP became a legal obligation (MEB, 1997). Afterwards, the Regulations on Special Education, which put into practice in 2000, defined IEP as "a special education program developed for the individual with special needs; approved by the individual's family; prepared in accordance with the needs of the individual, the family, and the teacher; and containing supportive education services necessary to achieve the goals set beforehand"; and also having an IEP team at schools and other institutions that work on inclusion basis became compulsory (MEB, 2000). The Law # 5378, enacted in 2005, and Regulations on Special Education Services, legislated in 2006, defined the educational assessment and IEP processes. In the Regulations on Special Education Services, announced in 2006, the responsibility of developing an IEP was assigned to the related units at schools and other institutions (MEB, 2006).. During the academic year of 2009-2010, totally 76.204 students with special needs at both primary (71.142) and secondary (5062) schools continued their education within inclusion classes (MEB, 2010)

3.The Benefits of Individualized Educational Programs for the Teacher, the Disabled Child, and the Family

3.1. Benefits of Individualized Educational Programs for the Teacher

Preparing and using individualized educational programs help improve teaches' knowledge and skills of teaching; enhances his/her skills to observe, record, monitor,, and assess; and provides economy through effective and

efficient educational activities. It offers support to the teacher for the preparation of daily lesson plans. It serves as an assessment tool to determine if the child is moving along the goals or not, and it increases the communication and collaboration with IEP team (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998).

3.2. Benefits of Individualized Educational Programs for the Disabled Child

Individualized educational program assists the evaluation of the child's level to be included into the general education program, the identification of his/her strengths and weaknesses, and the adaptation of the goals within the general education program in accordance with the idiosyncratic features of the child. It helps to balance the instructional goals with the child's age, gender, disability type and severity, living conditions, and interests and priorities; and it also entails keeping the record of all of them clearly and regularly. It eases the inclusion of the disabled child into the regular class with instructional methods appropriate for him/her, and offers opportunities to learn at his/her own pace. In doing this, IEP supports the socialization of the child with special needs through formal education by normalizing the school life for the student and integrating him/her with the society. Furthermore, it gives the chance to closely watch how well people in charge of administering the program are performing by providing a system in which the development of the student with special needs can be monitored and assessed, which in turn offers an opportunity to make necessary changes in time (Mc Loughlin, Lewis, 1997).

3.3. Benefits of Individualized Educational Programs for the Family

The expectations and needs of families are also taken into account during the formation of individualized educational programs. The families are informed about which of their needs can be met and what the outcomes of the program might be. IEP serves as the communication medium between the families and the school crew.

Families are responsible for informing the school staff on the demographic information about the family, the family's strong and weak points, and the child's characteristic features; and on the other end of the information flow, they are informed about their child's current performance, capabilities and needs, and skills and interests. Afterwards, families form their expectation about their child's development according to the information they are provided; and they convey their priorities and how they will help the education process to the relevant third parties. Family's knowledge about behavior modification is enriched by the school personnel. They are given the freedom to monitor and assess their child's development objectively. Individualized education program also serves as a tool to supervise families', schools', and other related parties' efforts and contributions to the improvement of the child's current condition (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998).

4. IEP Research in Turkey

IEP literature is limited in Turkey. This study mainly covers the research about IEP development process. Küçüker Kargın, Akçamete, (2002) concluded that the staff working at CRCs (Counseling and Research Centers) where children with special needs are assessed and placed into a program (be it a school or an institution) generally held negative attitudes towards team work necessary for the development of IEPs, and found themselves inadequate in terms of the competences required by the Law# 573. However, CRC staff is responsible for the preparation of IEPs and educational assessment process, and they provide special education support to the schools in their hinterland. In another research (Tike, 2007) conducted to identify the attitudes towards IEP preparation, CRC crew and the teachers attending in-service training programs were determined to have negative attitudes towards IEP, yet the ones who had received applied in-service training programs (Küçüker, Kargın and Akçamete, 2002), the ones with more amount of professional experience, and the class teachers (Tike, 2007) were found to have more positive attitudes towards IEP preparation. Moreover, gender was identified to have no significant effect in terms of the difficulties experienced by teachers during the preparation of IEP; senior teachers were determined to struggle more compared to younger teachers; CRC crew was found to go through fewer problems; long-term in-service training programs

were determined to be helpful in diminishing the number of problems; and teachers who attend the process of IEP preparation were identified to deal with fewer problems during the application of IEPs (Tike, 2007). Kücük, Kargin and Akçamete (2002) concluded that in-service training programs on IEP preparation heightened teachers' perception of self-competence. Another study designed to examine teachers' and school managers' opinions stated that both managers and teachers regarded IEP as a tool eliminating individual differences and believed that the theoretical steps necessary to develop an IEP were not followed properly in practice (Çuhadar, 2006). Furthermore, teachers and managers were found to lack necessary information about IEP, not to get adequate help from CRCs or other schools applying IEPs about IEP planning; and children with special needs were determined to fall back of the syllabus since no IEP was prepared for them (Çuhadar, 2006). Kargin, Acarlar, Sucuoğlu (2005) pointed that 80% of teachers didn't prepare any IEPs, administered the syllabus without making any of the necessary changes, and taught through use of repetition and homework assignments along with some reinforcers. According to the data obtained from the research conducted by the Ministry of National Education on "Assessment of Inclusion in Practice" (2010), 60.7% and 43.42% of teachers have difficulties in preparing IEPs and making necessary changes on the instructional syllabus, respectively. As one can easily observe, IEP stands as the salient problem in inclusion practices, and IEP development process is the most common subject that teachers want to get informed about.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In our country, relevant legal regulations and legislations made the school and the teacher the focus of IEP preparation process, but schools seem to be slow in coping with these alterations. Unfortunately, the practice of IEP is not applied as required and predicted by the laws on special education services in our country. Teachers go through a lot of difficulties in preparing IEPs, adapting their teaching process in accordance with IEPs, and assessing students' success. The reasons leading to these difficulties are a) lack of education, b) disobeying the IEP processes, and c) lack of time.

The Ministry of National Education should provide applied in-service training programs and necessary materials for the proper practice of IEP to the teachers. At universities, the relation between the outcomes and the goals mentioned in IEPs should be investigated thorough research based practices, and studies to determine the efficacy of the current applications should be designed. Furthermore, valid and reliable IEP assessment tools that will compare the quality of IEPs with students' progress results should be developed.

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